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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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JANUS FOR JANUARY

The month of January opens our calendar this year for the 21 hundredth time. It was in 153 B.C. that the first of January was proclaimed the official beginning of the new year, and naturally enough, since it was the festival of Janus, the Roman god who presided over all beginnings. On the first day of the year he was invoked as the god of good beginnings and was honoured with cakes called januae. Quarrels and disturbances, even all unnecessary work, were avoided on that day; good wishes were exchanged and presents of sweets were made as an omen that the new year might bring nothing but that which was sweet and pleasant.

Janus attended to many other beginnings. He opened the gates of heaven as he set out in the morning and closed them again as he returned in the evening. Through the gates of his temple the Consul marched to war and those gates stood open until peace was declared. Janus saw to the start of life of all kinds: Of human beings, of animals and seeds, of springs, wells and streams. It was natural therefore that he should start the series of coinage, and his head does appear on the *as*, the unit of Roman currency. Good examples may be seen in the large collection of Roman coins in the Royal Ontario Museum. Most impressive is a 2,200 year old coin, a bronze piece nearly 3 inches in diameter and weighing 1 Roman pound. From its face Janus looks out: a double head, huge and bearded, with one face looking forward to the new; the other turned back to the old.

BATS IN OUR BELFRIES

This is the time of year when mammal experts at the Royal Ontario Museum expect to hear outcries from citizens of the Province that they have encountered bats in their attics or cellars. The species they find on capture is the Big Brown bat, which used to hibernate in caves, but in our cities may pick on almost any dark and sheltered spot. Then the proverbial January thaw may warm him up a bit, and stir him to activity. Most other species of Canadian bats move to warmer climates in the U.S.A. during winter.

Such a mild spell may bring out other mammals as well, the groundhog, the chipmunk or the skunk. The latter's wavering track across the snow is frequently seen in January.

When no thaws soften winter's icy blasts, the deer have a particularly hard time of it. They find deep snow difficult to navigate, and in their search for food, they are forced to confine themselves to small areas which they beat down into deep paths. This practice gave rise to the term deer "yarding."

The black or grey squirrel is untroubled by cold and snow, for now is the time when he can literally reap the fruits of his summer and fall industry. Many of his nuts he buried singly, but he can find them, even under three or four feet of snow—probably by scent.

SPARE THE SNOWY OWL

One of the most beautiful of all Canadian owls is the big Snowy Owl, which periodically invades agricultural Canada from its Arctic breeding-grounds.

In summer, these owls subsist largely on Lemmings, small Arctic rodents. The Lemmings fluctuate in numbers from year to year and seem to be cyclic, reaching population "peaks" about every fourth winter.

With the "crash" of the Lemmings, the Snowy Owls desert their arctic home and migrate down into southern Canada and the northern United States, spending the winter in the marshes, along the shores, and in the farming country.

During some flights, particularly last winter, large numbers of these big predators spread themselves over the settled parts of Canada and the northern United States. Many were shot by thoughtless persons, forgetting, or not knowing that an examination of their food in southern Ontario, made at the Royal Ontario Museum last winter, revealed it to be 98% rodents—rats and mice, mostly—among the worst enemies with which the farmer has to contend. Although powerful enough to carry off poultry and ducks, the Snowy Owls seldom exhibit the necessary inclination or agility to go after that type of food.

A flight of minor proportions (compared with the heavy influx last year) has again reached southern Canada, and farmers and sportsmen would do themselves a favour by allowing the Snowy Owls to spend the winter with us unmolested, for they constitute one of the best checks we have on the undue increase of the hated "field mouse."

INDIAN CHINTZES SHOWN

Indian Chintzes now on display in one of the textile galleries of the Royal Ontario Museum were selected from the late Harry Wearne's magnificent collection of painted and printed textiles. Cotton fabrics such as these, with their exotic designs in gay colours applied by a combination of painting and resist-dyeing, were the forerunners of our chintzes of to-day. Even the name "chintz" comes from a Hindu word meaning spotted or variegated.

Although their origin goes back to very ancient times in India, it was not until the 17th century that they were imported in large quantities to Europe. Their popularity grew to such proportions that they became a very important item in the trade of the various East India Companies. Besides those of purely Indian design, there are others designed to please the taste of the country to which they were exported. Some contain tulip and other flowers as seen in Dutch flower paintings; others have dainty floral sprays, so popular in France in the 18th century. The Indian tree pattern appears in many variations on large panels for draperies, while other daintier designs were intended as dress fabrics. All of them contain a wealth of detail which should be a source of inspiration to the designer.

COMING EVENTS AT THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Jan. 6th—8 p.m. Toronto Field Naturalists.
Jan. 7th—Opening of Exhibition of Willis collection of Paul Kane original sketches (previously scheduled for Dec. 15th).
Jan. 17th and 18th—8.15 p.m. Family Night Travel Film "Realm of the Wild" and others on the U.S.A.
Jan. 20th—8.30 p.m. "Channel Island of Mystery" film and lecture by the Dame of Sark.
Jan. 31st—8.15 p.m. Family Night Travel Films "Janosik" (Czechslovakia).